

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

Chapter One

The Mystery of the Rapture

What I am teaching about the Rapture of the Church is nothing new. I am simply passing along what I have learned from great Bible teachers of the past; along with what I have learned from my own study of the Word of God.

As we begin our study of prophetic event number one, the Rapture of the Church, we do not make the acceptance of what we believe a test of orthodoxy. That is determined by your belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. However, an understanding of this subject will help you greatly in your joy and peace of mind, and I believe it will help you walk more circumspect in this world.

There is a possibility that people living today will actually take part in one these two events, the Rapture or the Tribulation.

Although we do not know the day, or the hour, we do know the Rapture could happen at any moment. If you are saved, you will go in the Rapture. If you are not saved you will enter the Tribulation.

God has pre-written the future. The Bible, the inspired Word of God, boldly proclaims in detailed exactness profound prophetic events that will affect every living soul on the face of the earth. What assurance do we have that these future prophecies are reliable? By the simple fact that every single prophetic event of the past has been literally fulfilled to the letter, therefore, we can look forward with the same certainty and confidence to a literal fulfillment of the prophecies in the future.

As we undertake this study of such an event as the Rapture, a word of caution and explanation is in order. First, we have nothing new to add to the Word of God. We have no special revelation apart from the Bible.

Then, too, as we propound the great themes of Bible prophecy, we must be careful about speculation and guesswork; for much harm can be done by interjecting our ideas and opinions as the Word of God. We must never try to make the Bible say something it does not say. If we differ, let us do so in a Christian spirit of love and understanding, for none of us has all the light on the mind of the great God and Saviour. Although we may not agree, we can at least rejoice that we have once more been to the Bible, the Book that has all the answers.

There may be many events in the Word of God that we do not understand at this time. However, there is one event, the Rapture of the Church, so plainly revealed that I do not understand how anyone could miss it. The “catching away of the believers” is the next main event on God’s calendar. This momentous event has been the expectation of believers down through the centuries.

The Holy Spirit, through Paul, some 2000 years ago, revealed the great mystery that some day, unannounced and without warning, the Lord Jesus would descend from heaven with a shout and call forth all believers of all ages. He will call forth all believers who are in their graves, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, transform (or change) all living believers. Both those from their grave, and the living believers shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and shall forever be with the Lord. This, my friend, is the hope of the believer, founded on the clear revelation of the Word of God. The

terms used, in the Bible, to describe this event gives us a great deal of information as to what it is, and when it will take place.

There are a number of descriptive terms used to describe this event. It is called:

(1) The Blessed Hope.

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13)

(2) Purifying Hope.

“And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.” (I John 3:3)

(3) Catching away.

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (I Thessalonians 4:17)

(4) Comforting Word.

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” (I Thessalonians 4:18)

(5) A Mystery.

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” (I Corinthians 15:51)

(6) Translation.

“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.” (Hebrews 11:5)

In the record given of Enoch, his experience is called a “translation.” All the above terms are used to describe the event better known to us as the “Rapture.” While the exact word “rapture” is not used in the Bible, the word is a fitting description of what transpires when the Lord comes for His own.

There are four prominent views that relate to the teaching of the Rapture of the Church. Three of these views agree that the Bible teaches that there will be a Rapture, but are not agreed as to the time it will happen. One group believes the Rapture will take place before the Tribulation. This is called a “pre-tribulation” Rapture. Another group believes that the Rapture will take place after the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation. This is called a “mid-tribulation” Rapture. Yet another group believes that the Rapture will take place after the seven years of the Tribulation. This is called a “post-tribulation” Rapture.

The fourth group believes that after the Church has converted the world, Christ will come back, and the Great White Throne Judgment will take place. The good will go to Heaven, and the bad will go to Hell.

Which group is right? All cannot be right. Our purpose in this series of lessons is to go to the Bible, and let the Bible speak for itself. There is a vast amount of Scripture to be considered as we deal with this subject.

We read in I Corinthians, chapter 15:

**“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for**

**the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (I Corinthians 15: 51-53)**

This event, this “blessed hope,” is called by Paul “a mystery.” He says, “behold I show you a mystery.” This event was a mystery in many different ways. It was a mystery to the Old Testament saints, because the full revelation of both the Church and Rapture was not clearly revealed until after Pentecost. The Old Testament saints could only see the coming of a Messiah as a King, to set up a Kingdom. Even John the Baptist asked, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3) They asked the Lord, just before He ascended back into Heaven, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)

Paul’s teaching of the Rapture of the Church was not only a mystery to Israel, but it is also a mystery to the unbelievers today. The unregenerate man does not understand or believe it. To him it is foolishness, or just the dream of some sentimental religionist who is not able to cope with the future. We read in II Peter:

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” (II Peter 3: 3,4)

The Meaning of the Word Mystery

Paul says, “Behold I show you a mystery.” What is the meaning of this word “mystery?” The word translated “mystery” is an interesting one. In the original Greek the word is “musterion.” It comes from a root word “muo,” which means, “to keep secret.” Paul says, “Behold I show you a “deep secret.” The word originally comes from the practice of ancient secret societies, and was applied to the secret pass-word in rituals. Only those who knew the “musterion,” or the secret pass-word, could enter and know the inner secrets of the lodge or secret order. This is the word that Paul uses when he says, “Behold I show you a mystery,” or a “secret pass-word.”

The New Testament use of the word “mystery” has reference to some operation, or plan of God, hitherto unrevealed. It does not carry the idea of a secret to be withheld, but to be published.

“Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.” (I Corinthians 4:1)

Paul uses the word “mystery” twenty-one times in his writings. It was a mystery (or secret) before concealed, but now revealed. It is a mystery because only those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour, and are washed in His blood, will be translated. This is made perfectly clear from the Scripture, **“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again...” (I Thessalonians 4:14a)** This is clearly the condition for salvation as also taught in Romans.

**“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.
For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9,10)**

Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ is also called “the gospel.”

**“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;
By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.
For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;
And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” (I Corinthians 15:1-4)**

In the day that Christ Jesus calls the Church unto Himself, the unsaved will not hear this call. Only believers will hear and understand.

**“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” I Thessalonians 4:16,17)**

We read, in the book of Acts, of an incident happening, when Paul was converted on his way to Damascus. A voice spoke to him and he understood, but not so with the others who were with him.

“And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid: but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.” (Acts 22:9)

So, too, it will be in that day when Christ calls the Church unto Himself. Many years ago I heard someone describe this event as follows: “You could be listening to my voice on the radio, yet your next door neighbor does not hear a word that I am saying. Even though he has a radio, and his radio is turned on, he does not hear my voice because he is not tuned to the proper wave length.” The unbeliever is not tuned to the proper wave length. In order to hear Jesus’ shout in the air, you must be born of the Spirit of God.

I trust that you will see why the Holy Spirit calls this event “that blessed hope.” It means that when Jesus comes, living believers will be reunited with those loved ones who have “died in the Lord.” Those who have gone before, that husband, (or wife) father, mother, or child who is “asleep in Jesus” will be restored to you, and “we shall be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air.”

“Behold, I show you a mystery.” Remember, this is only for believers. The lost will remain behind to face the wrath of Almighty God.

We do trust these words may be of comfort to those of you who are trusting Him, especially those of you who have laid loved ones to rest. Your heart is lonely and broken, and there seems to be no comfort in this world at all for you. I pray that these words will cause you to fix your eyes upon the glorious future, “when the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout... Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” This, beloved, is the only hope in the hour of sorrow. It is no wonder that Paul admonished the Thessalonian Christians, in their bereavement, to “comfort one another with these words.”

Just a word to you who are unsaved. This event may happen at any moment. You may have a loved one who is saved, and they will go to be with the Lord. But if you are not saved you will be left behind to face the greatest time of sorrow and tribulation this old world has ever known. The Scriptures teach us to “be ready” for He will come at a time when you think not. Why don’t you, right now, receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and then you can rest in that “blessed hope.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

Chapter Two

Two Phases of Christ’s Second Coming

There is something more certain than the sun coming up in the morning. A prophetic theme of the Bible that stands out above all others, and that is the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. All professing Christians may not agree as to when it will happen, how it will happen, or even where it will happen, however, all must agree that the Bible teaches IT WILL HAPPEN!

One of the arguments made against the ones who teach the secret Rapture of the Church is that we teach two second comings of Christ; when the Bible, they say, teaches only one. Now it is true that Christ leaves Heaven only once when He comes back the second time; however, we must remember there are two phases to the Second Coming. There are two separate groups of Scripture that describes this event. One group of Scriptures speaks of a secret coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to take His Church out at the Rapture.

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night.” (I Thessalonians 5:2)

Another group of Scriptures speaks of a public appearing of Jesus to this earth in judgment, and to set up His Kingdom.

“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” (Revelation 19:11)

Another way to determine the difference in the two phases of His coming is that when He comes for His Church He is accompanied by only one other Being, the Archangel.

**“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”
(I Thessalonians 4:16)**

At His public appearing, where He comes all the way to earth, we see from the following Scriptures that He is accompanied by a great army of the saints.

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.” (Jude 1:14)

“And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.” (Revelation 19:14)

The first phase of His coming will be FOR His Church. This is the Rapture, or translation of the Church. The second phase of His coming will be WITH His Church to reign upon the earth.

We see, then, two distinct lines of revelation pertaining to this momentous event. Unless we distinguish between His coming in the air “for His Church,” before the Tribulation, and His coming “with His Church,” after the Tribulation, we shall never be able to understand the Bible revelation concerning the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Failure to make a distinction between these two lines of revelation concerning the Second Coming of the Lord has resulted in much confusion, and all sorts of wild-fire predictions. Many false cults have been started by those who think they have some special revelation as to the time of the Lord’s return. They depart from what the Bible teaches, despite the solemn warning against such practice. Popular religious books of the day are books predicting, if not the exact day, at least the year of the Lord’s return.

In the Olivet discourse, Jesus said that neither man nor angels, nor He Himself knew when He would return. In Matthew, chapter 24, verse 36, speaking of His second coming, Jesus said, **“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”** We also read in Mark, chapter 13, verses 32 and 33:

**“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.
Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.”
(Mark 13:32,33)**

Again, Jesus tells us in plain language:

**“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?
And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.” (Acts: 1: 6,7)**

Let me repeat, the secret to understanding the Bible doctrine of the Second Coming is to make a definite distinction between the two phases of His coming. Making a definite distinction between the two phases of His coming is the key that unlocks the treasures of blessings that comes with an understanding of this precious truth.

We now turn to the Scriptures that deal with the two phases of the Lord's return. Although interwoven throughout the New Testament, upon close examination we see a marked difference as to the nature and scope of each set of Scriptures. Starting with the Scripture in I Thessalonians, we read:

“Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (I Thessalonians 4:17)

Notice very carefully that we “meet the Lord in the air.” Here He does not come all the way to earth. The Scripture also tells us:

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” (I Thessalonians 5:2)

Paul had just been talking about the Rapture of the Church in the preceding chapter. Here he refers to the Rapture of the Church, Christ coming for the Church, as a “thief in the night.” In other words, it is a “secret coming.” How can we reconcile this with His coming as related in Revelation?

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.” (Revelation 1:7)

You will immediately recognize that there is a vast difference in these two passages of Scripture. The public appearing of Christ, when every eye shall see Him, results in wailing and weeping. (Revelation 1:7) These are not comforting words at all.

When Christ comes, as a thief, for His bride there is rejoicing, and Paul says, “Comfort one another with these words.” The “secret” Rapture is a time of joy, but the “public appearing” is a time of judgment and doom for the ones who have rejected Christ.

There is a period of time between His coming FOR the believers and His coming WITH the believers; a difference of a period of time when He comes IN THE AIR, and when He comes ALL THE WAY TO EARTH, and plants His feet upon the Mount of Olives. We read, in Zechariah, the description of His coming all the way to earth.

“And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem on the east...” (Zechariah 14:4a)

“And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.” (Zechariah 14:9)

You will notice that in the first passage of Scripture, in Thessalonians, He comes in the air and we meet Him there. But in this Scripture, in Zechariah, it says that He

comes all the way to the earth, and His feet stand upon the Mount of Olives. The first event, the “secret” event, is the translation of the Church. The second event is His “public revelation,” when He comes all the way to earth.

Let me remind you, in every case where the Rapture is mentioned it is given as a comfort and blessed hope to the believer. But in every passage of Scripture dealing with His coming to earth publicly, it is in judgment and accompanied by solemn warnings and dire promises of judgments.

Another Scripture that teaches the two aspects of our Lord’s return is found in Titus, chapter 2, verse 13.

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13)

Here we see two statements describing the two phases of our Lord’s return. First, that “blessed hope,” which is the Rapture of the Church. Then the “glorious appearing,” of our Lord Jesus Christ, which refers to His public return to earth, when “every eye shall see him.”

There are numerous passages of Scripture concerning this teaching, but we will quote just one other, found in Revelation.

“After this I looked, and behold a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me, which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.” (Revelation 4:1)

Now the language in this Scripture indicates that this is the Rapture; the voice of the trumpet and the call to come up, all identifying it as that event. John, representing the Church, is immediately caught away to Heaven.

Notice carefully, the Church is not mentioned again until the end of this book. She never appears once in the rest of Revelation until She comes with Christ, as His bride, in Revelation, chapter 19.

The following chapters of Revelation record the judgment that God is going to bring upon this earth. Search as you will, you cannot find any reference to the Church on earth after the third chapter of Revelation. The Church is mentioned fourteen times in the first three chapters, but is entirely absent after that.

Revelation, chapters 5 through 18 deals with the Tribulation on the earth, but the Church is not seen. She is not here. She is with her Lord in Heaven, caught up (Revelation chapter 4) before the Tribulation period.

We know from the Scriptures that there will be two phases of Christ’s coming. First, He will come in the air to receive His saints. At that time the first resurrection will occur; the dead in Christ will rise first, and the living Christians will be changed. All believers will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air, and taken away for the Wedding Supper, and the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Meanwhile, on earth there will be great tribulation. Then will come the second phase of Christ’s second coming, when Christ will return with saints and angels. He will appear on the Mount of Olives, with a mighty army of angels following Him. He will

end the battle of Armageddon, set up His throne in Jerusalem, judge the Gentile nations, and reign a thousand years.

The only signs mentioned in the Bible for Christ's second coming refer to His revelation, when He comes to reign on the earth, in the second phase of His return.

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints.” (Jude 14)

You see, He comes FOR HIS SAINTS, then the Great Tribulation here on earth; and then he comes WITH HIS SAINTS. He comes first FOR THEM; then He comes WITH THEM to execute judgment. If you will keep these two events separate, it would add greatly to your understanding of the Scriptures.

Would you go in the Rapture if Christ should come today? If He was to come in the next few minutes, would you go in the Rapture, or would you be left behind to go through one of the greatest hours of tribulation this earth has ever known?

To go in the Rapture, you must have Christ as your Saviour. To have Him as Saviour, you must receive Him. Why not now? Say yes to Him, and invite Him into your heart and life.

The Rapture will be sudden and without warning. As in the days of Noah, it was business as usual. The Bible does not teach an end time revival, but on the contrary. The world will be further from God than at any time in history. We are to keep looking for and expecting our Lord; not because of world events or newspaper headlines, but by faith, because He said He was coming!

**“...I go to prepare a place for you.
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”
(John 14:2,3)**

Chapter Three

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture

There is a basic unity among fundamental believers on some of the major themes of the Bible, such as the Resurrection, the Bema Seat Judgment for the Christian, and the Great White Throne Judgment for the unsaved. There is a basic agreement on the subject of Heaven and Hell, and the fact of the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, there is one prophetic theme on which there is a difference, and that is the relationship of the Rapture and the Great Tribulation. Will the Church of Jesus Christ, the true born again ones, enter into that time of sorrow known as the Great Tribulation?

In our first lesson on this subject, we noted the different views of various ones. The four commonly held opinions are: (1) Pre-Tribulation – the Lord will rapture the Church before the Tribulation. (2) Mid-Tribulation - the Church will be raptured in the middle of the Tribulation. (3) Post-Tribulation – the Church will be raptured at the end of the Tribulation. (4) The Church will convert the world, and then the Lord will come.

Let me again repeat, as we face the question of the pre-tribulation return of Christ, we do not make it a test of orthodoxy. Those who disagree with us may be sincere Christians. Nor is it, of necessity, a point over which we break fellowship.

Possibly the chief reason why confusion exists on this subject is that the theme is so vast. The Scriptures that must be considered are many so that we cannot, at this point, go into the complexity of this theme, but simply ask certain questions, and try to find the answers.

So far in our study of this subject we have covered such things as the definition of the word "rapture." We found it to mean "the sudden catching away of believers," (the Church) when Christ comes in the air. We have found that the Rapture will be in a two-fold manner; the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and the transformation of the believers. We have found that the Rapture will be a surprise to the world, "the children of darkness." Christians are not "children of darkness," so we should not be surprised. The Rapture will be only for a certain group; those who are "in Christ," both those who have died "in Christ" and the believers who are living when He comes.

We found the Rapture to be but one phase of the Second Coming. At the close of the dispensation of the Church, and before the beginning of the tribulation period, Christ will appear in the clouds to receive His own. After the tribulation period, Christ will return to earth WITH His saints to establish His Kingdom on earth.

We ask these questions: Is there certain promises in the Word of God that exclude Christians from this hour? Will the Rapture take place before the Tribulation?

First, let us find out what is meant by the "Tribulation." From the viewpoint of man, the tribulation period is a time of intense rebellion against God. It will be a time of worldly prosperity under the leadership of the Antichrist. It is a revolt against the sovereign God of the universe.

We cannot fully understand the tribulation period until we see it from God's viewpoint. Until we see that the tribulation is a period of seven years, a time in which God is punishing and destroying the Christ rejecting nations of the earth, we cannot fully understand this time. This time of sorrow is covered in the Bible, in the book of Revelation, chapters 6 through 19. The chief passages dealing with the characteristics of the Tribulation is in Revelation, chapter 6.

**"And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;
And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:
For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17)**

From this we learn that early in the tribulation period, it is characterized as a "time of the wrath of Almighty God." These passages, and many others, declare that the chief characteristic of the tribulation period is that it is a time of divine wrath upon the earth.

We find that there are promises in the Word of God that exclude believers from this specific time of the wrath of Almighty God. First of all, every injunction in the Bible is to watch for the return of the Lord. The Bible tells us to “be ready” for His coming. There is not one Scripture that teaches to watch for, be on guard, or prepare for the Tribulation. On the contrary, we are told to “wait for His Son from Heaven.”

**“For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.”
(I Thessalonians 1:9,10)**

What could be more plain. The Thessalonians were to be waiting for and expecting the Lord from Heaven; which has delivered us from the wrath to come, the great Tribulation. We are not looking for signs in the heavens, but for the Son from Heaven.

The Tribulation is not destined for the Church. It is known as the time of “Jacob’s Trouble,” and the hundred and forty-four thousand who are sealed and go through this time of sorrow are all from specific tribes of the Nation of Israel.

We find in the Scriptures that the Church is not appointed to the wrath of God, but unto salvation.

“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Thessalonians 5:9)

In studying the book of Revelation we find that the Church, spoken of in the first three chapters, is not referred to again until chapter 19. It is not found on earth during the Tribulation. Furthermore, it is not even mentioned.

Since the Tribulation is to come upon Israel and the world, the Church, not being of the world, has no part in this judgment. In the many passages of Scripture dealing with the subject of the second coming of Christ, we find Christ either coming FOR the saints, or coming WITH the saints. He cannot come with the saints until He has come for the saints. This indicates that the Church will be taken away, and then brought back when He comes to set up His Kingdom.

Types also bear out the fact that the Rapture must take place before the Tribulation. In the Old Testament, all the types and foreshadows of the Church age indicate and teach that the Church will be taken BEFORE this time of judgment. The first illustration that we have of this is found in the book of Genesis. Enoch was translated BEFORE the flood came upon the earth. Lot was delivered out of Sodom BEFORE the judgment of God fell. Moreover, the angels told Lot that they could not do anything until he left the city. Joseph, a type of Christ, received a Gentile bride BEFORE the seven years of famine came upon Egypt. Moses, also a type of Christ, received a Gentile bride BEFORE the period of tribulation in Egypt.

We have every reason to believe that we, the believers, are the “restraining” force, taught in II Thessalonians, which is keeping the Antichrist from being revealed.

“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.” (II Thessalonians 2: 7,8)

This hindering force must be removed BEFORE the Antichrist can come on the scene, and the Tribulation will not happen until he comes on the scene, for he is one of the major characters in this time of judgment from Almighty God. The believers are the restraining force, and they must be removed BEFORE this time.

We are told to “watch and pray” that we might escape that day. Why would we be commanded to “pray” if God has no intention of answering? **II Peter 2:9 tells us: “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.”** This Scripture definitely indicates that God is going to deliver the believers from this time.

We are told that we are the “children of light” rather than darkness. Of course, darkness is a type of the night, the darkness of the tribulation hour. The Lord has definitely committed Himself to keep the Church (born again believers) out of the Tribulation. He has made a definite promise in Revelation that says:

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.” (Revelation 3:10)

This is speaking of the tribulation time, and He has promised to keep us from that specific hour. If there were no other Scriptures in the Bible that deal with this subject, this one would be enough for me.

Now some would have us believe that only a few, or only part of the believers, are going in the Rapture. However, He is not coming for a part of His bride. Not just a part of the “body” is going, for He is not going to take His bride in pieces. It is going a complete body.

Any disobedience among the children of God, the born again believer, will be taken care of at the Judgment Seat of Christ. If a believer insists on continuing in sin, they will face the Judgment Seat of Christ, to have these things taken care of; nevertheless, they will go in the Rapture. They will face the Judgment Seat of Christ to have unconfessed sins judged by Him. This is plainly taught in the third chapter of I Corinthians. So do not think for a moment that you will get away with living in disobedience to God.

I believe that an understanding of this precious truth of the Rapture is one of the greatest incentives for holy living of any doctrine that I know of in the Scriptures.

When questioned about the time of His return, Jesus made reference to two specific periods in history, the days of Lot and the days of Noah. There is something about these two periods of history that should interest all believers.

There is, however, one particular event that stands out above all the other happenings of those days, the translation of the man, Enoch. The Bible declares that “Enoch walked with God” for 369 years after he begat Methuselah.

There was something about the birth of Methuselah that changed the life of Enoch. I believe this is revealed in the meaning of the name “Methuselah.” The name is a compound word meaning, “when he is gone then it will come.” This meaning strongly implies that Enoch received a revelation from God that when Methuselah died, the flood would come. Right here is the secret of why Enoch walked with God AFTER he begat Methuselah.

Enoch knew that he would be translated before the flood. “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death.” (Hebrews 11:5) Enoch knew that he would not perish in the flood. God had said that He would “hold off the flood as long as Methuselah was alive; but when he is gone, then it will come.” Enoch, not knowing when or how long this would be, was expecting an “any moment” departure from this earth.

All who are born again will be translated before the tribulation judgment; and not knowing when this will be should be an incentive for every believer to walk in constant fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter Four

God is Longsuffering

At the closing of our last lesson, we introduced two remarkable men, Enoch and Methuselah. Methuselah was known for his extraordinary long life, and it is said of Enoch, “he walked with God.” We also mentioned that Enoch walked with God AFTER he begat Methuselah. Then too, we mentioned the secret of Enoch’s walk. The reason Enoch walked with God AFTER the birth of his son is revealed in his name. Methuselah means, “when he is gone, then it will come.” As long as Methuselah was alive the flood would not come; however, the moment he died, God would send the deluge. According to Hebrews, chapter 11, Enoch knew he would be caught up before the flood.

**“By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”
(Hebrews 11: 5)**

Not knowing when his translation would occur would account for his continual walk with God. We read of the “longsuffering of God” in I Peter, chapter 3.

“...when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.” (I Peter 3:20b)

This is in harmony with the Scripture in Genesis, chapter 6.

“And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Genesis 6:3)

God postponed the judgment of the flood for one hundred and twenty years, or as Peter tells us “God waited.” There are perhaps a number of reasons as to why God postponed the flood, for we read in II Peter:

**“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”
(II Peter 3:9)**

We are specifically told that the primary reason that God waited was He was waiting for the Ark to be built. “...when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing...” (I Peter 3:20b).

The Bible record shows that Methuselah died just before the flood. The moment that God called him home, the flood broke upon the earth, and we shall see that it happened at the exact date of Methuselah’s age, nine hundred and sixty nine years.

For those of you who doubt the meaning of the name “Methuselah,” as meaning “when he is gone, then it shall come--- it is just a simple matter of mathematics. First, put down the number 187, which was the age of Methuselah when his son, Lamech, was born. In Genesis, chapter 5, verse 25, we read:

“And Methuselah lived an hundred eighty and seven years and begat Lamech.”

The first figure, 187 is the age of Methuselah at the birth of Lamech. The next number, 182, is the age of Lamech when Noah was born. We read:

**“And Lamech lived an hundred and eighty and two years, and begat a son:
And he called his name Noah.” (Genesis 5:28,29)**

When we add the numbers 187 and 182 we have the total 369; the age of Methuselah when Noah was born. Methuselah became a father at the age of 187, and a grandfather at the age of 369. We have one more figure to add, found in Genesis, chapter 7.

“In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.” (Genesis 7: 11)

Noah was 600 years old when the flood came. Methuselah was 369 years old when Noah was born. 369 and 600 add up to a grand total of 969. In the nine hundred and sixty-ninth year of Methuselah’s life (or when he died) the flood came. God has kept His Word, “...when he is gone, then it shall come.” This, I believe, as we have seen, is the reason for the long life of Methuselah.

We have a strong indication, from the book of Genesis, chapter 6, just how long God extended the life of Methuselah.

“And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man,

for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Genesis 6:3)

Subtract one hundred and twenty years from the life of Methuselah, and he would be approximately the same age as all the others that lived at that time. This will also explain why we have exact details, and dates, recorded about these men, Noah, Methuselah and Lamech.

The seventeenth day of the month, in the sixth hundredth year of Noah’s life, no doubt was the very date on which God removed Methuselah, and immediately the flood followed. So you see, Methuselah kept back the flood, for God had promised that as long as Methuselah was living, the judgment would not come.

It is doubtful that there is a teaching in the Scriptures that the Devil hates more than the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ; for when Christ comes, this will mean the end of Satan’s diabolical reign on earth, and will signal his judgment and doom. He not only hates the coming again of Christ, but he also hates the true doctrine concerning this event; and he especially hates preachers who insist on preaching the second coming of our Lord. He knows the power of the “blessed hope” better than we can possibly know. He knows that it is a “purifying hope,” and stimulates holiness in the lives of God’s people. He knows too, what a tremendous incentive for evangelism the hope of Christ’s imminent return really is; so he will do everything in his power to rob God’s people of this “blessed hope.”

Deny, Delay, Discredit

The Devil follows one of three avenues of attack in his all out effort to destroy this precious truth of the Second Coming of Christ. First of all the Devil will deny the fact of Christ’s return.

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” (II Peter 3: 3,4)

Having failed in denying the fact of the Lord’s return, the Devil seeks to delay the nearness of the Lord’s return by having men say that certain events must happen before Christ returns. His next attack will be to discredit the credibility of the Bible by having men set dates for Christ’s second return.

Satan’s first attempt is to deny the literal return of Christ. He seeks to make men believe that the many promises of Christ’s return, spoken of throughout the Bible, are not to be taken literal at all, but are merely symbolic and must be spiritualized. He also deceives by saying that “certain events” are the second coming of Christ.

Born again believers are not deceived by this denial, for we know full well that the coming of Christ will be visible, literal, and bodily.

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called

**God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God.
Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?
And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.
For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way,
And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:
Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,
And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:
That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (II Thessalonians 2:3-12)**

There is a group of people, referred to in these Scriptures, who have postponed receiving the truth until it is too late. Now there will be people saved during the Tribulation. A multitude that no man can number will be saved. However, these will be from the tribes of the earth who have never before heard the gospel. The gospel will be preached during the Tribulation and a multitude will be saved, but those who have heard and rejected before the Tribulation will not be saved, **“...because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.” (II Thessalonians 2: 10,11)**

As we read this Scripture in II Thessalonians, chapter 3, we notice that there is a “restraining force.” The Scripture says:

**“And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.
For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, (or he who now hinders, will hinder) until he be taken out of the way.
And then shall that Wicked (or, wicked one) be revealed...”
(II Thessalonians 2:6-8)**

The Tribulation cannot begin until the Antichrist is revealed; and before he can be revealed a “restraining force” must be removed.

**“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;
Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” (II Thessalonians 2:3,4)**

We read in verse six:

“And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.” (II Thessalonians 2:6)

That which “restrains” or “hinders” will continue to do so until removed.

We see, then, that the chief character of the Tribulation is the “man of sin,” the “son of perdition.” This “man of sin” is totally responsible for all the suffering of the Tribulation, and he cannot be revealed until the “restraining force” is removed. The word “revealed” means “to take off the cover.”

In identifying this “restraining force” we see, first of all, that it is a personality. Paul calls him a “he.” Secondly, it must be someone more powerful than Satan. From this we can conclude that it would have to be a part of the God-head, representing God on earth. Moreover, we know that the Holy Spirit indwells believers.

“But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” (Romans 8:9)

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? (I Corinthians 3:16)

We can say, then, that the Church (born again believers) is the restraining force that must be removed before the Tribulation can begin.

At the Rapture of the Church, this “restraining force” will be removed, and then Satan is going to deceive, with signs and lying wonders, those that perish, **“because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”**

Now notice what God is going to do: **“And for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”**

If you will not believe the truth, and receive it, that you might be saved; after the Church is translated there is no hope for you who have heard the way of salvation.

If there are those who have never heard the Word of God, and they survive the catastrophes of the Great Tribulation, then, of course, there might be a chance for them to hear and to be saved. But to those who have heard the Word of God and rejected salvation, the Scriptures make it very plain what will happen to you.

“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.” (II Thessalonians 2:11)

For what cause will God send them strong delusion?

“...because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.” (II Thessalonians 2:10b)

“For this cause” God will send you a delusion, a strong delusion, that you should believe a lie and be damned. Why? “Because you believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” You loved your sins more than life.

May I plead with you today; do not put off the decision to receive Christ as your Saviour.

There are many, I am sure, who would receive Christ if they only knew how. I am going to tell you how you can be saved. First, I ask you; "Are you a sinner?" The Bible says you are: **"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)** Jesus says, **"For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."** **(Luke 19:10)** Take your place before God as a sinner. After you recognize yourself as a sinner before God, the next step is to receive the eternal life that God has provided in His Son, Jesus Christ, by asking Him to come into your heart and life and save you, just as the Scripture says:

**"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,
and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him
from the dead, thou shalt be saved." (Romans 10:9)**